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ABSTRACT

This report describes the Pledge of Nonviolence, a peace-educated program designed for all levels of schooling. The seven components of the Pledge expand the value of respect for others to focus on the understanding of, tolerance for, and cooperation with those who are different. The Pledge also acknowledges the need to respect the whole of creation, encouraging the attitudes and skills necessary for appreciating, protecting, and enhancing the earth. The Pledge helps students understand the culture of violence and stresses the urgency of action against violence and injustice in communities. The seven components of the Pledge are the following: respect self and others, communicate better, listen carefully, forgive, respect nature, play creatively, and be courageous. Three additional goals are appended to the Pledge: proclaim visually the commitment to being a peacemaking community through drawings and symbols, celebrate peacemaking through holidays and special events, and involve parents in all peacemaking activities. The Pledge of Nonviolence offers schools a vision, a strategy, and the concrete skills and values for becoming a peacemaking community. A copy of the Pledge is included. (RJM)

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ED 421 738

The School as a Peacemaking Community: 10 Key Ingredients

by James McGinnis (1)

One of the obvious lessons from Jonesboro, Arkansas; Pearl, Mississippi; Padukah, Kentucky; and every other school and playground where children are killed, especially by other children, is the desperate need for peace education at all levels of schooling. The circle of safety, love and peace that once surrounded most children in this society has been broken. Children are no longer as safe at school, on the way to and from school, in their neighborhoods and even at home. As we mourn the loss of safety, peace and life itself, we also realize that our tears of mourning must reinforce our commitment to teach the ways that make for peace.

There are many definitions and programs of peace education, but the one that seems to be more holistic than most is embodied in the seven components of the School, Classroom, and Family Pledges of Nonviolence. These seven components (and the resources to teach and live them) begin with the interpersonal peacemaking skills that are integral to the many conflict resolutions programs developed in the past 20-30 years. But the Pledge goes beyond these interpersonal peacemaking attitudes and skills in five important ways. First, like several other peace education programs, the Pledge expands the value of "respect for others" to focus on respect (understanding of, tolerance for, and cooperation with) for the diversity of peoples in our society and world. Secondly, the Pledge explicitly acknowledges the need to respect the whole of creation, to realize that there is no peace on earth until there is peace with the earth. The kind of peace education reflected in the Pledge teaches the attitudes and skills necessary for appreciating, protecting, and enhancing the earth itself. Thirdly, the sixth component of the Pledge ("To Play Creatively") includes helping students understand the culture of violence that is sweeping across this country and globe and that easily leads to the tragedies experienced in Jonesboro and every other community. Fourthly, the seventh component of the Pledge ("To Be Courageous") stresses the urgency of action against the violence and injustice are paralyzing many individuals and communities. The kind of peace education reflected in the Pledge moves from awareness to concern and to action. It educates the mind, heart, and hands. An effective and comprehensive peace education program enables students to face the issues of violence and injustice by helping them to understand the causes of violence, by touching their hearts and motivationg them to want to take action, and by providing skills, opportunities and suppo:t for taking action that is appropriate to their age and circumstances. Finally, the Pledge's approach to peace education includes an explicit commitment to build a peacemaking community. "Creating circles of peace to break the cycle of violence" is more than a slogan. The Pledge invites individual classes, the school as a whole and students' families to use the Pledge corporately, as a way of building circles of commited peacemakers -- circles of cooperative learning and play, circles of safety and encouragement around younger students, circles of caring around hurting individuals and groups in the community, circles of inclusion and justice around those left out or discriminated against, and circles of peace and resistance around places and situations of violence.

The Pledge of Nonviolence offers individuals, families, and schools a way of living each day nonviolently in the face of escalating violence. The seven components of the Pledge offer each individual dozens of opportunities each day to place tiny pebbles of love on the scale of nonviolence to offset the weight of the boulders of violence that are threatening our local communities, the global human community, and the earth itself. The Pledge of Nonviolence offers schools a vision, a strategy, and the concrete skills and values for becoming a peacemaking community. In addition to some specific suggestions for teaching each of the seven Pledge components, this article concludes with three other ingredients for a more effective peace education program.

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1. "Respect Self and Others"

Disrespect is a growing phenomenon threatening human relationships at all levels. Kids feel "dissed"; so do teachers and parents. Put-downs and name-calling are leading more quickly than ever to violence. Meanness and negativity seem to be escalating in every environment. But those who nurture children as parent, teacher, coach or counselor can also build them up. The ways are endless, non-verbal as well as verbal. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist peacemaker, writes of smiling as the most basic peacework. Respectful, encouraging touch can counterbalance the growing incidences of hurtful touch. Even the respectful ways we use the names of our students can make a difference. (2)

Because many children and youth are musical learners, using songs that carry this message of affirmation is pedagogically critical. Many communities have music that binds their members. Many schools have school songs; some high schools call them "fight songs." Why not "peace songs"? Most elementary schools already integrating the Pledge into their curriculum are using Red Grammer's wonderful audio cassette TEACHING PEACE. "See Me Beautiful" and "I Think You Are Wonderful" both reflect this first component of the Pledge: "See me beautiful. See the best in me. It's what I really am, all I want to be. It may take some time; it may be hard to find. But see me beautiful." (3)

But there is a broader dimension of respecting others that schools have the opportunity and responsibility to promote. The school as a peacemaking community reaches out into the wider community to embrace the diversity of the human community. The Pledge of Nonviolence calls us to break down those racial barriers that separate the human community into often hostile camps -- "us against them". Efforts at multicultural education can break down the stereotypes that are part of these racial barriers; and can help all members of the school community see, respect, and celebrate the richness of the many cultures that make up this country. Efforts to integrate our student bodies, our faculties, the curriculum, and community service programs provide opportunities for breaking down barriers and building bridges across racial divides. As the most multiracial nation on earth at the beginning of the next millenium, the United States has the unique opportunity (and perhaps mission) of showing the world that the "rainbow" can work, that the diversity of the human community can be brought together in a harmonious society. The Pledge of Nonviolence is a reminder to work at this each day. (4)

2. "Communicate Better"

Teaching communication skills and problem-solving skills is becoming more and more essential in schools, as many children aren't learning them at home. Many excellent resources are available and described in the Alternatives to Violence Kits for Public Schools, including the wealth of activities in the EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: K-5 manual. Several of these activities are worth highlighting here because conflict resolution, problem-solving, and mutual decision-making are essential elements in building a peacemaking community. (5)

a) "Peace Table". This is a table in the classroom (or school) that serves as the place for resolving conflicts in a peaceful way. Students are given the option of using it to resolve their conflicts, alone or with the class present. Basic rules govern the process, some of which can be determined by the students themselves as they get to know the process. Basic rules include one person talking at a time (some teachers have a "talking stick" for the speaker to hold), sharing feelings as well as statements about a problem, paraphrasing back to the speaker what the listener heard before the listener gives their side, brainstorming possible solutions before choosing one, and coming to a joint decision before leaving the table.

b) "Peace Blanket or Rug". Some teachers have a large sheet, quilt, or blanket on which their students have each added their own symbol of peacemaking. This can be spread on the floor or hung in the front of the class, whenever the class needs to gather to problem-solve or resolve some conflict. It can also serve as the cover of the teacher's desk when it is to be converted into a "peace table", if a separate table isn't available.

c) "Peace Zone". Some schools have designated a certain area as a place for peaceful conflict resolution or quiet meditation. In one school, a corner of the cafeteria was blocked off with two large bookcases. Inside were things like a comfortable rug and soft cushions to sit on, candles, peace artifacts, peacemaking posters. Not only is this a major visible reminder to all students, staff and parents of the school's commitment to peacemaking, it also provides a place for peacemaking to happen.

d) "Class Meetings". While peace tables, blankets, and zones are more emergency measures in times of conflict, class meetings are a more regular way for students to practice their peacemaking skills, to be part of class decision-making and to build a classroom community. If the school is to become a peacemaking community, students need regular opportunities for helping to shape that community.

e) "Peer Meditation". Many schools have students trained as peer mediators for helping other students resolve their conflicts. These programs enhance the peacemaking skills of students, significantly reduce student fighting, and give the school a much clearer identity as a peacemaking community.

Some of these processes can be conducted in a circle, which is the geometric symbol of mutuality, community, and peace. We are truly "creating circles of peace to break the cycle of violence."

3. "Listen Carefully"

One of the essential ways of respecting others and communicating better is listening. Young people who are not listened to at home and/or at school are more likely to seek attention and recognition in negative ways. Disempowered youth sometimes turn to gangs for a sense of belonging, recognition, and power. Listening to young people can turn this around. Listening means setting aside our own agenda and tuning in to another. Many adults, especially teachers, can dominate others with their voice. Listening is a powerful antidote to domination and violence and a key discipline for learning nonviolence. Perhaps we can take a lesson from human anatomy. We have two ears and one mouth, a reminder perhaps to listen twice as much as we speak. Good listeners are often the glue that binds a friendship, a family, or classroom community together.

4. "Forgive"

No element of the Pledge of Nonviolence is as difficult or as vital as this for building and rebuilding a peacemaking community. Almost instinctively, young people in this society identify with an "eye for an eye" ethic. Perhaps it's because that's what they see in adult society -- interpersonal paybacks for verbal or physical hurts, competitive paybacks in sports, societal paybacks for crimes (capital punishment), international paybacks. Only forgiveness can break these cycles of violence. Because young people are so susceptible to this societal penchant for retaliation, we adults must model a willingness to apologize when we have hurt another, acknowledge our mistakes when we are wrong, and forgive when others have hurt us in some way.

But in addition to our own modelling of forgiveness, young people need other models, stories of forgiveness that can touch their imaginations and hearts and inspire them to rise to this level of peacemaking. Among those in our own time and the same age as our students are heroic peacemakers like Anne Frank and Ruby Bridges. Ruby was only six years old in 1960 when she was chosen to be the first African American student to integrate a New Orleans public school. As told by Robert Coles in his book THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES, every day Ruby had to walk into school through a crowd of adults yelling and cursing at her. Because none of the white parents allowed their children to attend school for months, Ruby was the only student in her first-grade classroom. One day her teacher noticed Ruby stop in the midst of the taunting crowd and appear to be talking with them. When she asked Ruby what she had said to them, Ruby replied that she wasn't talking with them; she was praying for them. She had forgotton to say the prayer she said each morning as she approached the school. (6)

5. "Respect Nature"

A peacemaking community embraces more than just the humans in its environment. It embraces the whole community --plants, animals, and the rest of creation. Chief Luther Standing Bear is insightful: "Lack of respect for growing living things soon leads to lack of respect for humans too." (7) Boys who enjoy hurting or killing small creatures may hurt or even kill smaller or physically weaker human creatures as teens or adults. Nurturing gentleness and compassion in boys as well as girls is critical as a violence prevention strategy, and nature offers ample opportunities for doing so. School or neighborhood gardens, classroom plants and pets, and other places of beauty give us daily opportunities to care tenderly for creation, to appreciate creation, and to gentle down after stressful moments. Just as music soothes the savage beast, so does beauty. The more our young people (and ourselves) are confined to an urban environment of concrete and steel, the more we need places of natural beauty to help us gentle down, to center, to commune with creation. Outdoor learning and challenges are effective strategies for building self-confidence, mutual trust, and community. "Nurture nonviolence through nature" is a motto and strategy that pays a huge dividend of peace. (8)

6. "Play Creatively"

The crisis of escalating violence in our society is perhaps most visibly evident when we look at the cultural dimensions of life. Recreation and entertainment are increasingly violent, from toys to videos and TV, to video games and sports. We are awash in a culture of violence. Sports can be such a healthy human activity and helpful channel for human energy. But some sports, especially at the professional level, are becoming increasingly violent. And these professional athletes become the heroes or role models for many youth. The more competitive and lucrative sports become, the more violent they seem to become.

Some school sports programs have formulated codes of conduct for coaches, athletes and parent spectators. Many emphasize intramural sports, teach cooperative games and play, and offer a wider variety of activities for students than just sports. Schools can provide opportunities for the whole school community to play together. Occasional family fun nights at school allow children and adults to play together, to see and enjoy one another in different ways, and to build community. A peacemaking community is a community that plays together. To help reduce the emphasis on winning in sports, one small contribution adults can make -- another pebble of the scale of nonviolence -- is to reverse the order of questions we ask players after a game. Instead of the single question "who won?", we can ask three questions, perhaps in this order -- (1) "was it fun?" (2) "did you do your best?" (3) "what was the score?"

In terms of media violence, schools need to teach critical thinking and viewing skills. No matter how hard some parents work to turn off the TV, outlaw or limit video games, etc., their children will watch and play these at their friends' homes. Because so much child play today is imitative of popular TV shows, often violent, schools can counter this trend by emphasizing imaginative play, dramatic play, and the arts. One of the fascinating discoveries that educator Doug Huneke made in his research into the lives of three hundred rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, searching for common traits in their upbringing that might explain their courageous actions, was that all three hundred had some experience in public performance as young people. (9)

7. "Be Courageous"

The boulders of violence -- gun violence, media violence, hate violence, domestic violence, school violence, the violence of poverty, racism and sexism -- need to be named for what they are and confronted with courage and hope. Today, we live in the face of the multi-headed beast of violence. Some see it as a demonic spirit. We are challenged to confront this beast of violence with courage and hope.

The school as a peacemaking community cannot remain closed in on itself, a safe haven shielding its members from the violent world outside. educators and schools have a transformative as well as an educational role in society, as leaven and light for our world. Such transformative peacemaking can include

actions like bucking the trend toward winning at all cost; breaking down barriers of race and class in the classroom, in faculty make-up, and in pairing with other schools and community service projects; encouraging letter-writing to legislators, TV networks, and corporations in opposition to unjust practices or violent programming; mentoring younger students in nearby schools; encouraging faculty, students, and parents to stand (and/or march) in solidarity with victims of racism or violence. Some schools have found another way to help prevent violence in their community. By opening their facilities after school for recreartion programs, they are providing an alternative for youth who would otherwise be at greater risk for getting involved in unhealthy activities and dangerous situations.

Many schools have gone public with these and other actions or service projects and have received coverage in local newspapers or on TV. These stories become part of the history of the school community. These stories help to reinforce the sense the school has of itself as a peacemaking community. Stories are so important for inspiring and motivating others. Celebrating the lives of famous peacemakers as part of the school calendar is an important strategy for nurturing the school's peacemaking commitment. (10)

8. Proclaim Visually the Commitment to Being a Peacemaking Community

Young people are often visual learners. Visible symbols are integral to educating our imaginations. And our symbols of peacemaking can proclaim to the entire school community, to those who enter our school, and to the wider community that we are a peacemaking community. There are lots of possibilities. Most schools using the Pledge have students draw pictures to illustrate each of the seven components. Many of these drawings decorate the school corridors as reminders to live the Pledge to all who pass by. Some schools have posted in a prominent place an enlarged version of the Pledge in the center of a larger display that includes the signatures of all the students in that school who have taken the Pledge. Some classes have done this with the Classroom Pledge. Some schools have designed their own symbol for peacemaking and displayed it prominently. One school had students design and paint a "Peace Circle" on the schoolyard, which served as a "peace zone" and a place where playground conflicts could be handled by peer mediators, as well as a public statement to all who pass by. Some schools have proclaimed themselves as "Fight-free Schools" and have a "Fight-free School Flag" which flies at full-mast as long as no fights have occurred and at half-mast when a fight has occurred. (11)

9. Celebrating Peacemaking

Schools recognize and reward excellence in academics, in athletics, and sometimes in the arts. Recognizing and rewarding excellent in peacemaking activities has started in some schools by recognizing those involved in peer mediation. Some schools have begun to honor "peacemakers of the month." Schools that are using the Pledge generally conclude the year (or semester) with a public taking of the Pledge, sometimes in the presence of educational and civic leaders from the community. There are also a number of appropriate days and periods during the school year that offer opportunities for explicit focus on peacemaking. These include:

January 15 -- the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

January 30 -- The anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

January 30 - April 4 -- The "Season for Nonviolence" (beginning with Gandhi's anniversary and ending with the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. King)

April 22 -- Earth Day

April 30 -- Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah)

First Monday in June -- Samantha Smith Day (the young Maine girl who stimulated citizen diplomacy with the former USSR)

October 2 -- Gandhi's birthday

October 16 -- World Food Day

October 24 -- United Nations Day

October 25 -- the anniversary of the death of Sadako Sasaki (of SADAKO AND THE THOUSAND PAPER CRANES)

December 10 -- Human Rights Day

10. Involve the Parents

Parents are an integral part of the school community and need to be included in the school's commitment to be a peacemaking community. It is vital that parents be offered the opportunity to reinforce at home the peacemaking skills being learned and practiced at school. FAMILIES CREATING A CIRCLE OF PEACE is the 40-page booklet to help families live the Family Pledge of Nonviolence, which parallels the School and Classroom Pledges. Both the booklet and the Family Pledge are available in Spanish, while the Family Pledge is also available in Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Polish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese; with other translations to follow.

Conclusion

The boulders of violence are huge. The pebbles of nonviolence are tiny. But millions of tiny pebbles can counterbalance even the biggest of boulders. Alone we can do only a little, but together we can do a lot. Through the Pledge of Nonviolence, we can help turn our schools into peacemaking communities and begin to rebuild the circles of love, safety, and peace around the children in our families and communities.

For further information, contact:

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Footnotes

1. The Pledgeof Nonviolence is the unifying tool of the Families Against Violence Advocacy Network (FAVAN), an expanding coalition of national and local organizations, national church offices and local faith communities, public and parochial schools. FAVAN is coordinated by the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network at the Institute for Peace and Justice in St. Louis. FAVAN's goals include one million families and ten thousand schools committed to the Pledge by the year 2000, when it becomes an integral part of the UN's Decade for the Culture of Nonviolence.

2. For many other activities for promoting interpersonal peacemaking, see James McGinnis, EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: K-5 (Institute for Peace and Justice, 1997). This manual is part of CREATING CIRCLES OF PEACE: The Alternatives to Violence Kit for Public Schools, K-5. There is also a Kit for Public Schools, Grades 6-12. (Institute for Peace and Justice, 1997).

3 . TEACHING PEACE is part of the Kit for Public Schools, K-5. A teachers book of lyrics, the music, and a variety of classroom activities for each of the songs on the tape is also available from the Institute for Peace and Justice.

4. One of the most helpful resources for K-12 for celebrating racial diversity and challenging racism is Kathleen McGinnis, CELEBRATING RACIAL DIVERSITY (Institute for Peace and Justice, 1994). This manual is also part of both the Public School Kits. For a musical reflection of the human community as a "rainbow people", Susan Stark's recording of the Native American chant "Rainbow People" is available on a audio cassette entitled RAINBOW PEOPLE (available from the Institute for Peace and Justice). This chant is the theme song for the EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE manual, which includes an essay based on the chant and the signs for signing the chant.

5. Each of these five processes is described in more detail in EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: K-5.

6. Robert Coles, THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES (New York: Scholastic, 1995)

7. This quotation is taken from FAMILIES CREATING A CIRCLE OF PEACE (Institute for Peace and Justice, 1997), which is part of both the Public School Kits.

8. EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: K-5 has a wonderfully creative 12-step process for building a sense of appreciation and reverence for creation and for standing in defense of creation and is included in both Public School Kits (adapted for middle and secondary students in that Kit).

9. Doug Huneke, THE MOSES OF ROVNO (Dodd-Meade, 1985). Some of the other ten common characteristics are that they were all adventuresome, were raised in a home where hospitality was a high value, were exposed to suffering at an early age, had empathetic imaginations, had experienced some form of marginalization themselves.

10. CELEBRATING RACIAL DIVERSITY has stories and classroom activities around the lives of nine racial justice heroes; as well as activities based on twenty children's books (K-12), many of which are stories of courageous action.

11. For schools who have made the Pledge integral to their curriculum, contact the FAVAN office at the Institute for Peace and Justice.

School Pledge of Nonviolence

*M*aking peace must start within ourselves and in our school.
Each of us, members of _____ School,
on this day, _____ 19____,
commit ourselves as best we can to become nonviolent and peaceable people.

To Respect Ourselves and Others

To respect ourselves, to affirm others and to avoid uncaring criticism,
hateful words, physical attacks and self-destructive behavior.

To Communicate Better

To share our feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express
our anger, and to work at solving problems peacefully.

To Listen

To listen carefully to one another, especially those who disagree with us, and to
consider others' feelings and needs rather than insist on having our own way.

To Forgive

To apologize and make amends when we have hurt another,
to forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

To Respect Nature

To treat the environment and all living things,
including our pets, with respect and care.

To Play Creatively

To select activities and toys that support our school's values and to avoid
activities that make violence look exciting, funny or acceptable.

To Be Courageous

To challenge violence in all its forms whenever we encounter it, whether at home,
at school, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly.

This is our pledge. These are our goals. We will check ourselves on what we have pledged
once a month on the _____ day of the month for this school year
so that we can help each other become more peaceable people.

"Eliminating violence, one school at a time, starting with our own."

Signed by _____

Attach a page with signatures of all school members if desired

From the Institute for Peace and Justice's Families Against Violence Advocacy Network

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Response Form

__ Please add our class/school to the National Registry of families, classes and schools taking the Pledge of Nonviolence; _____ students took the Pledge; attached is a list of their signatures.
__ We have a copy of the Family Pledge and will duplicate it and give it to our parents.
__ Please send us ____ additional copies of the Family Pledge ($5 per100); amount $ _____
__ Please send us ____ copies of the FAMILIES CREATING A CIRCLE OF PEACE booklet to distribute to our parents ($5 ea for 1-24 copies; $4 ea for 25-99; $3 ea. for 100+); amount $ _____
Note: prices include postage for US mailing; make check payable to: FAVAN/IPJ; Total enclosed $ _____
__ Please send us a list of additional resources for implementing the Pledge.

Name _____ School/Program _____

Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Return to: FAVAN, c/o Institute for Peace and Justice
4144 Lindell Blvd., #408, St. Louis, MO 63108; 314-533-4445; Fax: 314-533-1017; E-mail: ppjn@aol.com

Classroom Pledge of Nonviolence

*M*aking peace must start within ourselves and in our classroom.
Each of us, members of _____ class at _____ School,
on this day, _____ 19____ ,
commit ourselves as best we can to become nonviolent and peaceable people.

To Respect Ourselves and Others

To respect ourselves, to affirm others and to avoid uncaring criticism,
hateful words, physical attacks and self-destructive behavior.

To Communicate Better

To share our feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express
our anger, and to work at solving problems peacefully.

To Listen

To listen carefully to one another, especially those who disagree with us, and to
consider others' feelings and needs rather than insist on having our own way.

To Forgive

To apologize and make amends when we have hurt another,
to forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

To Respect Nature

To treat the environment and all living things,
including our pets, with respect and care.

To Play Creatively

To select activities and toys that support our classroom's values and to avoid
activities that make violence look exciting, funny or acceptable.

To Be Courageous

To challenge violence in all its forms whenever we encounter it, whether at home,
at school, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly.

This is our pledge. These are our goals. We will check ourselves on what we have pledged
once a month on the _____ day of the month for this school year
so that we can help each other become more peaceable people.

"Eliminating violence, one classroom at a time, starting with our own."

Attach a page with your signatures

From the Institute for Peace and Justice's Families Against Violence Advocacy Network

**Creating a Circle of Families and Children, 1 Million Strong,
by the Year 2000**

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